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ABSTRACT

Five selections summarize training methods for the principalship from the perspective that cognizance of the complexities of being a principal arises from practice, thus experiential learning should be incorporated into preservice and inservice training programs. The first selection, "Making Sense of Principals' Work," by Kent Petersen, is a straightfoward analysis describing the complexities of a typical elementary school principal's work day. Petersen's observations are borne out by John Daresh's research paper, "The Beginning Principalship: Preservice and Inservice Implications," and William Johnson's and Karolyn Snyder's piece, "Instructional Leadership Training Needs for School Principals." They identify principal learning needs for more comprehensive and systematic school leadership preparation. Vivian Clark's "The Effectiveness of Case Studies in Training Principals, Using the Deliberative Orientation" shows a "hand-on" case study simulation approach to training principals that conveys the job's sophistication. Bruce Barnett offers another training model in "Peer-Assisted Leadership: Using Research To Improve Practice." Providing principals the opportunity to analyze their own behaviors in cooperation with a partner confronting the same kinds of challenges increases the trainee's reflective processes. (JAM)

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Volume 5, Number 1 November 1988

Training K-8 Principals

Thomas I. Ellis

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Training K-8 Principals

Thomas I. Ellis

Beginning school principals are confronted by an inevitable dilemma: they never know exactly what it is like to be a principal until they actually become one, at which point the consequences of not knowing what they are doing can be very painful.

The fact is that defining the principal's job is no simple matter; and without a good definition, educators and trainers of educators face a major puzzle in trying to identify effective methods of training principals. Such traditional avenues of preparation as teaching experience and coursework at a university have been useful but far from satisfactory. And so in practice we rely largely on on-the-job training to equip people for this complex and challenging responsibility, and sometimes the cost is a calamity. At any rate, debate continues about the best method of training individuals for the principalship.

The five reports summarized on the following pages approach that debate from a perspective that might be framed as follows: What do practicing principals wish they had known before they assumed their positions, and how can this "after the fact" awareness of the complexities of the principalship be incorporated into preservice and inservice training programs for school principals?

The first selection, by Kent Peterson, is a straightforward and frequently quoted analysis of a typical elementary principal's work day. Laying aside such idealized abstractions as "instructional leadership" or "change facilitator," Peterson draws a precise and unblinking portrait of a job characterized by a bewildering variety of brief interactions, frequent interruptions, and taxing cognitive and emotional demands.

Peterson's observations are borne out by the research done by John C. Daresh on the beginning principalship. Interviewing twelve first- or second-year principals, Daresh uncovered a set of procedural and interpersonal areas in which these principals expressed a common desire for more comprehensive and systematic preparation. On the basis of these concerns, he offers a set of recommendations for a more "hands-on" approach to administrator training.

W. L. Johnson and Karolyn Snyder analyzed the training needs of principals in a Texas school district, specifically those areas of training that principals feel they need in order to become instructional leaders as well as administrators. They also relate the training needs of principals to the characteristics of effective schooling that have emerged from recent research.

The last two selections focus on training techniques that are likely to address the needs identified in the first three papers. Vivian Clark describes a "deliberative" approach to the preservice training of principals, based on the use of case studies that convey an integrated sense of the complexity of the principalship. Bruce Barnett describes "Peer Assisted Leadership," a promising new approach to inservice training that provides an opportunity for principals to analyze their own behavior on the job in cooperation with a partner who is confronting the same kinds of challenges.

These approaches, and others like them, point the way toward bridging the gap between the tidy theoretical formulations that characterize the academic preparation of principals and the bewildering array of responsibilities, expectations, and demands that they confront during their first year on the job.

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1 **Peterson, Kent D.** "Making Sense of Principals' Work." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, April 1981. 14 pages. ED 208 557.

This paper, written at the start of the decade, has become something of a classic in its field, on account of its lucid assessment of the actual day-to-day working conditions of elementary school principals, in contrast to the more common idealized models of the principalship. Based on observations of principals moment by moment throughout a typical school day, Peterson's thesis is that the tasks of elementary principals are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation.

Just how brief (and numerous) these tasks can be is suggested in a 1978 study that indicated that principals may perform as many as 50 separate tasks an hour and that 85 percent of their tasks are under nine minutes in duration. The nature of principals' work requires that they must gather information, assess it, and make decisions in rapid succession.

Furthermore, these tasks require a wide variety of unexpected skills—including bookkeeping, personnel management, budgeting, planning, and public relations—and a wide variety of interactions with individuals ranging from young at-risk children to teachers, parents, textbook salesmen, and central office administrators. Both in terms of their emotional intensity and the range of affective and cognitive responses involved, these interactions are more demanding than those that characterize leadership in most other types of organizations.

All these activities, moreover, are regularly interrupted by other tasks, problems, and crises, which arise so unpredictably that it is difficult for a principal to learn from one week's experience how to deal with the demands of the week following. As Peterson notes, so diverse and fragmented are principals' duties that they "have difficulty making sense of their day, much less their week or year."

This combination of brevity, variety, and fragmentation makes the job hectic, complex, and hard to learn experientially. Four characteristics of the job make experiential learning difficult: the goals are unclear and hard to measure; the interaction rates are high and contact is extensive; the bases for moment-to-moment decision-making remain diffuse and uncodified; and the articulation of goals and expectations is necessarily a shaky proposition because so many variables are involved. Those who select and train principals should be guided by these salient characteristics, Peterson says, and appropriate training might be designed to assist principals in analyzing recurrent patterns of their work.

2 **Daresh, John C.** "The Beginning Principalship: Preservice and Inservice Implications." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington D.C., April 1987. 18 pages. ED 280 196.

This paper describes a recent study of the characteristics of first- and second-year principals in a midwestern state, based on indepth interviews with twelve beginning principals. In each interview, responses were sought to two questions: What are the surprises that you have experienced on the job so far? What features of the principal's job have inhibited you from attaining the goals you set for yourself when you first started? In general terms, principals reported problems and issues in three broad areas—role clarification, limitations on technical expertise, and difficulties experienced with socialization to the profession and to a particular school system.

One initial observation common to all twelve respondents was that they did not know what the principalship was going to be like before they got into it. Despite their extensive preparation, few could imagine all the responsibilities associated with the title until they actually assumed the role.

Principals also reported the need for additional technical expertise to help them do their jobs more effectively. The expertise they felt they needed fell into two general categories: procedural and interpersonal. Procedural concerns included how to read computer printouts from the central office, how to address various legal issues, how to budget time or material resources, and how to implement central office mandates.

In the area of interpersonal skills, the principals felt the need for better conflict management and community relations skills. They also reported feelings of isolation, expressing a need for more feedback from their teachers and from the central office regarding their own performance. Similarly, the third major category of concerns related to the broad area of socialization to their professions: how is a principal supposed to gain an understanding of the role that the

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Prior to publication, this manuscript was submitted to the National Association of Elementary School Principals for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards.

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community expects of him or her?

On the basis of these common concerns, Daresh offers a set of recommendations for changing existing policies and practices in the preparation of principals. Suggesting that existing approaches to experiential learning are inadequate, he recommends that practicum work go beyond mere observation and "hands on" learning to include "an opportunity for the learner to engage in considerable reflection regarding the skills being learned, as well as the ways in which these skills might fit [a principal's] understanding of, and personal definition of, administration in general." Daresh also recommends specialized inservice training for beginning administrators in procedural and interpersonal skills. Finally, he recommends measures to reduce the isolation that beginning principals feel, perhaps through collegial support programs that provide consistent, honest feedback concerning job performance.

3 Johnson, William L., and Karolyn J. Snyder. "Instructional Leadership Training Needs for School Principals." *Journal of Educational Administration* 24.2 (Summer 1986): 237-53. EJ 350 719.

In recent years, the central job emphasis for principals has been redirected from school maintenance to instructional leadership. Accordingly, Johnson and Snyder begin by presenting a model of instructional leadership, based on effective school characteristics and leadership tasks that have been identified by researchers. The model conceives of instructional leadership as having three phases: planning (including schoolwide, team, and individual goal-setting); developing (including clinical supervision, staff development, curriculum development, performance management, and resource management); and achieving/assessing.

Next, the authors describe the development of an instrument to identify the specific training needs of principals as they relate to the tasks and skills identified in the model: school planning, staff and program development, and evaluation. This instrument, a six-point Likert-like scale, was used to survey 185 school administrators in Fort Worth, Texas. The survey addressed training needs in seven areas: the principalship, the school as an ecological system, creative problem solving, staff development, collaborative long-range planning, planning for school growth, and personal awareness.

Although the data showed a need for administrative training in all seven areas, "the principalship" emerged as the category of most concern to administrators, reflecting the dramatic changes in role expectations over the past decade. More specifically, administrators expressed a desire for more training in the following areas: (1) teacher performance planning and evaluation; (2) clinical supervision and observation technology; (3) creative problem solving and communications; (4) planning as it links school goals with school activities, teacher performance and evaluation, and management of goal attainment processes; and (5) personal awareness as it relates personal style to effective leadership performance.

The message emerging from this survey, say the authors, is that principals feel unprepared for the recent shift in emphasis toward instructional accountability. Principals want training in the various elements of annual schoolwide, team-level, and individual teacher planning and evaluation, and in staff development, program evaluation, and cooperative planning. They also seek ways to assess the influence of their own personal leadership styles on instructional outcomes in their schools.

4 Clark, Vivian N. "The Effectiveness of Case Studies in Training Principals, Using the Deliberative Orientation." *Peabody Journal of Education* 63, 1 (Fall 1986): 187-95. EJ 354 956.

One consideration in the debate over the best training method for principals is that, because of the complexity of the job, the best training approach might involve diversifying the focus beyond training in specific tasks to include training in the observational and analytic skills necessary to meet the complex and varied demands of the job as a whole.

One way to do this, Clark says, is to apply Zumwalt's "deliberative approach," originally developed for training teachers, to the preservice and inservice training of principals. This approach uses case studies for discussion, debate, and analysis to help develop principals' problem-solving and decision-making skills.

To show how case studies can highlight the contextual and complex nature of the principalship, Clark examines the use of four case studies as training tools. The principals in these case studies chose different approaches to discipline and instructional leadership. A thorough examination of each case reveals the pertinent variables in each school that contributed to the principal's approach. For example, one principal in a low-income, multiethnic school with poor performance levels and a high transiency rate favored a bullhorn and a stern, policing approach to disciplinary problems, whereas others with a more stable student population inclined toward a supportive, counseling approach. Clark illustrates how the topic of discipline can generate discussion of means and ends among prospective principals: could any of the principals have used a different approach to achieve a desired outcome?

The topic of instructional leadership likewise can provide a basis for illustrating the connection between means and ends. The four principals exhibited distinctly different kinds and levels of involvement in instructional matters, ranging from a heavy-handed role as overseer in the low-income school to a quietly supportive background role for the principal in the homogeneous, affluent neighborhood.

Comparing the different approaches used in these four cases, principals can debate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of each of the methods for achieving the desired ends. According to Clark, case studies not only stimulate discussion of alternative courses of action and of means and ends, but they also depict the complexities of the principalship and the need for principals to rely on personal judgment, rather than prescriptions. The discontinuous, varied nature of principals' work makes these deliberative skills very important.

5 **Barnett, Bruce G. "Peer-Assisted Leadership: Using Research to Improve Practice." *Urban Review* 17, 1 (1985): 47-64. EJ 324 749.**

During the winter and spring of 1982, the staff of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development conducted a series of open-ended interviews with principals in the San Francisco Bay area. These discussions left the researchers with a strong impression: principals work under diverse conditions and pressures, and they pursue solutions to problems that affect instruction and student achievement in many different ways. The complexity of these accounts suggested that a realistic understanding of the principal's role in successful schooling can come only from intensive observation of principals at work. And perhaps such observation could be provided by other principals, for their mutual benefit.

Accordingly, the Far West Laboratory developed Peer-Assisted Leadership (PAL), a unique professional development activity that enables school administrators to analyze their own leadership behavior and that of a peer partner in a nonprescriptive and nonjudgmental manner. During the year-long process, principals learn and apply various skills for collecting data about their partners and sharing that information with them in a useful way.

Barnett's paper begins with a brief history of the Instructional Management Program (IMP) that led to the development of PAL. The PAL training consisted of six full-day meetings with the IMP staff at intervals of about six weeks. Each participating principal selected a partner to work with throughout the entire process. During these meetings, participants learned the various skills they would need for gathering and analyzing information: general orientation and shadowing, reflective interviewing and theme building, clustering data by themes, final model production, and model presentations. Between meetings, the principals applied these skills in carrying out observations and in interviews that provided data about their partners' schools. By the time of the last meeting, principals were prepared to present models of their partners' instructional management activities to the group as a whole.

As a result of this training, the participating principals indicated that they benefitted from working with other principals and that they practiced more self-reflection, a process they found useful in helping them run their schools. Barnett's many examples of principals' reactions to the training illustrate their perception of the importance of these activities. The researchers believe that the combination of activities in the program—both observing and being observed—were largely responsible for this increased self-reflectiveness.

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